

Firm signs PR deal

MILTON Keynes-based DRS has appointed Friday's Media Group to promote its expertise in document design, printing, forms scanning, software, logistics, project management and consultancy.

Based in Linford Wood, Friday's specialises in business to business and government-focused public relations. Its clients include London's Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre.

Office sold for £1m

A PROPERTY investor has paid £1 million for the freehold of a 6,450 sq ft self contained office building on Wolverton Mill Business Park. Agents Lambert Smith Hampton acted on the sale of Walnut House on behalf of a private pension trust.

Green delight

EMPLOYEES at TNT Milton Keynes are celebrating after the Northfield-based company enhanced its 'green' credentials by gaining an ISO 14001 environmental accreditation at the first attempt.

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Gearbox sets a new standard

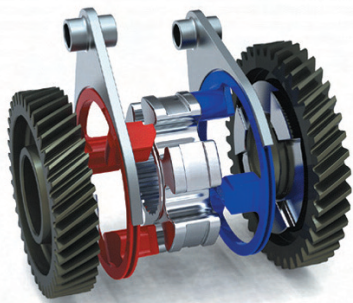
System attracts worldwide interest

THINK about the 65 million car and truck transmission systems manufactured worldwide every year. Now, imagine that you could make a more environmentally friendly system, with lower carbon dioxide emissions and superior fuel economy, by changing a few parts.

That is exactly what a Milton Keynes company has done with its new gearbox technology.

Zeroshift, based at Knowlhill, has developed an automated manual transmission method that engages the new gear before disengaging the previous one, giving a smooth gear shift and reducing fuel consumption.

The system has attracted the interest of vehicle manufacturers worldwide, in partic-



HOW IT WORKS

WITH a manual gearbox, the act of changing gear by dipping the clutch and lifting the accelerator means that the vehicle momentarily loses speed. The automatic gearbox gets around this problem but it is relatively inefficient.

The fundamental components are two drive rings that replace the synchromesh pack within an existing transmission. The drive rings are easy to shift via small, light shift forks that can be shifted by conventional hydraulic/pneumatic methods or by a novel shift-by-wire technique. The basic gearbox architecture and single dry clutch are retained.

ular in Europe and the Far East, and from the marine industry.

Funding from UK Trade & Investment's Passport to Export scheme contributed towards an exhibition stand, brochures and an overseas market visit to the USA. Zeroshift also took advantage of three sector-specific automotive marketing trips to Germany, Sweden, and Japan. Through UKTI's Overseas Market Introduction Service, meetings were arranged in Japan, which made it significantly easier to gain immediate credibility in that market.

Allies

Zeroshift business development manager Dr Ray Heath said: "UKTI has proved to be a definite asset for the business. Once we became involved with them, the business went from strength to strength and they were useful allies in helping us to connect with the right people in foreign markets."

Markets in Europe were easier to tackle than those in the Far East, where it was not only the language barrier that made doing business difficult.

"It is the non-verbal as well as the verbal that we needed to understand," said Dr Heath. "UKTI helped here, as well, especially with how to overcome potential cultural barriers and with negotiating the decision-making chain, which was sometimes long and protracted."

UKTI also helped with finance and arranging training courses for Zeroshift staff and made introductions to the best contacts at embassies and government departments.

Now the company is planning to launch on London's AIM stock market. It has already made a name for itself domestically and internationally, picking up three awards in 2007: the Milton Keynes & North Bucks Chamber of Commerce Award for International Trade - New Exporter; the Frost & Sullivan Company of the Year Award in the European Powertrain Market; and the SAE International Technology Award, received at the 2007 SAE World Congress in Detroit.

Awards honour innovators

THE SEARCH is on for the region's finest technology-led businesses and entrepreneurs. They will be honoured next month in the inaugural Bright Sparc Awards, run by the Milton Keynes-based Sparc technology network.

The ceremony will take place on May 14 at Cranfield University, on the eve of Cranfield Venture Day, a one-day conference and networking event for entrepreneurs. The awards are split into six categories.

Sparc network director Chris Dunkley, director of the Milton Keynes Enterprise Hub, said: "The Bright Sparc Awards are a great way for innovative companies in our region to showcase their work to an expert panel of judges and gain recognition for their achievements. Milton Keynes is home to many technology companies, all of whom are pushing the boundaries of their chosen specialism."

Online application forms are available from www.brightsparcawards.co.uk.

AIR SERVICE IS READY FOR TAKE-OFF

FORMER Cranfield University Aerospace PhD student Frank Noppel is on the verge of launching a company designed to fly customers 'on demand' all over the UK and continental Europe.

He has progressed the idea after identifying a niche in the market for such a service, aimed particularly at 'time-poor' business travellers and the affluent.

Based at Cranfield's Business Incubation Centre, Ambeo aims to offer a more cost-effective alternative to existing air transport services. It is also more convenient, meaning increased time effectiveness for business travellers, and will use the most efficient new aircraft.

Mr Noppel said: "This sort of business requires a large amount of capital to get off the ground. I am confident this business not only has the potential to improve the comfort and speed at which business travellers fly but, if successful and we hit all of our projections, Ambeo will expand to the wider population for a true air taxi service."

Frank has spent the last few years devising different inventions, winning the national start-up competition Environment Young Entrepreneurs Scheme and second prize in the 2007 Whittle awards.

He also was president of the Cranfield School of Management's Student Entrepreneurship Association.

◆ Frank Noppel: Looking to improve air travel for business users through a new air taxi service.

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